



Mount Baldy On the Move



Mount Baldy proves that bald can be beautiful! With very few plants growing on it, the dune has the desert look that most people associate with a sand dune. But unlike the desert, abundant rain in Northwest Indiana allows plants to grow on the dunes. Marram grass, also called dune grass, can survive on bare, wind-blown sand. Its roots literally hold the dunes in place. As generations of Marram grass and other pioneer plants live and then die, soils begin to build, stopping the dunes in their tracks. With time, a succession of other plants will grow. Today, black oak trees cover most of Indiana's dunes.



Unlike the forested dunes, Mount Baldy is moving; and wind, waves, and people are responsible. Waves continue to bring a new supply of sand to Mount Baldy, allowing its movement to continue. No one knows exactly how wind breached the dune's plant cover. Some scientists have speculated that massive sand blowing may have occurred due to steady drops in the level of Lake Michigan around the turn of the 20th century. Since that time, greater shoreline erosion, caused by nearby harbor structures and hundreds of thousands of visitors' feet, have prevented the dune from regaining its plant cover.



Today, newly planted Marram grass has the opportunity to take root and grow because park visitors are using the designated trail to the beach and summit. If the Mount Baldy project goes well, the dune will not overrun the parking lot any time soon.